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FM AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1412
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SUBJECT: SASSOU NGUESSO THROWS HIS HAT IN THE RING FOR JULY 12
ELECTION

REF: BRAZZAVILLE 172

1.Congo(Brazzaville) President Denis Sassou Nguesso announced, as expected, his candidacy for another seven-year term. The announcement was made at a large rally in Brazzaville on June 6.

2.Though the announcement had been expected, the circumstances were unusual. A crowd of thousands - certainly more than ten thousand but fewer than the half-million reported on local government controlled television - gathered to enjoy seven live bands and to hear numerous speeches exhorting the President to run.

3.The pro-Sassou orators, along with others who said they represented women, civil society, and youth, included:

David Charles Ganao of the UFD, who told a strange parable originating from the unlikely source of Andrei Gromyko, to the effect that it is preferable to wear one's old comfortable shoes than to don new ones.

Guy Brice Parfait Kolelas, Minister of Fisheries, read a message of support from his father, Bernard Kolelas, head of the MCDDI. Bernard Kolelas was forced into exile for about a decade at the end of the civil war in 1997, and

Former Prime Minister Jacques Joachim Yhombi-Opango.

4.Whatever the numbers who attended, the large rally was a tribute to the skills of its organizers, who reportedly offered a t-shirt and 2,000 francs (a little over \$4.00, a typical taxi fare or the cost of a beer) to each attendee.

5.Correction: In reftel, we mentioned that the campaign would begin on June 20; the formal campaign actually begins June 26, to comply with the two-week statutory period prior to the July 12 election.

EASTHAM